
XXI. *Account of a New Species of Muscicapa, from New South Wales.*
By Major-General Thomas Davies, F. R. S. and L. S.

Read February 6, 1798.

HAVING had the good fortune to procure fine specimens of the male and female of a singular bird from New South Wales, which the natives of that country call the *Merion Binnion*, or *Cassowary-Bird*, and as it is a species at present very little known, I am induced to present to the President and Members of the Linnæan Society an accurate drawing of both specimens, in hopes that it may be found worthy of their acceptance. I am sorry that I cannot at the same time furnish the Society with an accurate account of its manners. Even its genus appears to be rather difficult to determine with the certainty I could wish, and I shall therefore leave that decision to others more capable than myself. I have, as yet, classed it in my own collection with the *Flycatchers*, as it appears to me to approach nearest to that genus.

All the information which I have been able to procure respecting it, from Governor Philip, Colonel Nepean, and other Gentlemen, who resided some years in New South Wales, is, that it is found about Sidney and Botany-Bay, in marshy places, abounding with long grass and fine rushes, in which it hides itself very dexterously ;
that,

that, when disturbed, its flight is very short, like that of a grasshopper; and that it no sooner alights than it runs with such great agility that many who have been confident of their having covered birds with their hats, have, to their great surprise, seen them again take wing at no great distance: so that they are always difficult to catch. I have, however, to observe, that the colour of the bird, and the length of its legs, must greatly contribute to its so easily escaping the vigilance of those who pursue it. I am also induced, from the circumstance of its bill being well surrounded with bristles, to think that its food is small flies, and other insects which it catches amongst the roots of the grass and rushes.

The length of the bird, from the point of the bill to the end of the rump, is three inches; the bill is three-eighths of an inch long, of a brownish black colour, considerably curved at the point, having the base furnished with strong bristles, and nostrils large and low down; irides uncertain; head much flattened and narrow towards the base of the bill, with a pale azure bar from the base of the bill over the eye; throat, to the centre of the neck, on each side, azure; front part of the head, cheeks, breast, fore part of the shoulders, thighs, sides and rump, ferruginous; centre part of the belly nearly white; hind part of the head, neck, shoulders, back and rump, greyish brown, elegantly streaked with brownish black; feathers of the back and rump, long, soft, and of a silky texture; wings very short, scarcely reaching to the base of the tail, of a dark brownish black colour, edged with rufous brown; legs slender, three-fourths of an inch long, of a pale dun or horn colour; feet slender and long; claws crooked and very sharp, especially the hind one, which is the largest, all of the same colour with the legs; the tail, independent of the body, is four inches and more in length, shafts black and very slender, armed on each side with minute

slender filaments, like hair, of a black colour. The female is like the male in every respect, excepting that it has no azure bar over the eye, and that it is entirely of a ferruginous colour from the base of the under-mandible to the vent.

The natives of New South Wales give the name of *Merion Bin-nion* to this bird, on account of the great resemblance of its tail to the feathers of the Cassowary.

Since the above account was written, Dr. Shaw has examined the bird therein described, and has named and characterized it as follows :

MUSCICAPA *malachura*.

Soft-tailed Flycatcher.

M. fusca, subtus ferruginea; gula (maris?) cœrulea; cauda longa cuneata, rectricibus decompositis.

Brown Flycatcher, ferruginous beneath; the throat (of the male?) blue; the tail long and cuneated, with loose-webbed feathers.

TAB. XXI. represents the *Muscicapa malachura*, male and female.
